Degrees Of Initiation

Sparrow Song

What do the three (or four) degrees of Wicca entail?

Well, as I see it, the (in my case) three degrees reflect levels of competency. You have to know and maybe even be able to teach various things to be upped a degree. Also, I see the degrees as much like Church hierarchy. First degree makes you a priest/priestess, and makes you responsible for a small part of the lay community. Second degree is kinda like being a bishop - that's also when you become an "Elder" - and makes you responsible for lay community and what first degrees are in your group. In other words, 2nd degree has more and greater attendant responsibilities (which is as it should be, no?). In my tradition, 3rd degree is given when it looks like the person is ready to go off and found a coven of his/her own (preferably with his/her mate - they like to give thirds in pairs), which the person then should do (cause there shouldn't be more than one set of 3rds in a coven). 3rd is rather closer to 2nd than 2nd is to 1st, as I see it. And in the way of what one must know, well, it seems to consist of memorizing a basic ritual and knowing why it works, plus various other things too numerous and eclectic to mention here. Ultimately, I think, advancement is according to the whim of the High Priestess & Priest. Yea, it's a pain, but if you don't like it you can always "invent yer own grandmother" and start off on your own.<grin> After all, that's one of the good things about this religion: its flexibility. And as long as you don't dismember animals and children, you may even be recognized and acknowledged! (mostly joking) Seriously, I've been finding the whole degree system a pain lately, a source of unfair manipulation along the carrot-and-stick lines, so I'm somewhat bitter about it all. Brighit (are you out there?) may be better able to explain it, since she's a HPs herself, and of a very formalized tradition

Seems that while I've been gone there have been one or two requests for me to comment on things First, on degree systems: Yes, SeaHawk is right, we Gardnerians do have a fairly rigid system although each coven interprets it slightly differently. In Tobar Bhride [my coven] our first degree is NOT considered clergy nor is it eligible for CoG credentials because it is considered an acknowledgment of one's commitment to the Craft and the Coven, but not necessarily a commitment to clerical responsibility. First degrees are considered competent to do a circle for themselves only - and given only that part of the Book which is relevant to that scope of practice.

Second degree Priest/ess/es are considered teachers, and in our particular coven must have taught us, as a coven, something before elevation to that degree is considered. They are eligible to lead group celebrations and also eligible for CoG Ministerial Credentials. Elders, Third Degree Witches, in Tobar Bhride, are those with direct

experience of deity through a formalized ritual of possession. This experience, and a year of service to Tobar Bhride, are the requirements for Third Degree.

I agree with SeaHawk about the sometimes arbitrary forces at work in initiation and elevation. Unfortunately in many covens the HP & HPs feel themselves oath-bound to be arbitrary, authoritarian and autocratic, and absolutely not subject to any constraint or needing any consensus whatsoever. Or in some covens they will agree to consensus on the little things and arbitrarily disperse the big ones <listening, SeaHawk? *wink*>. In Tobar Bhride, to avoid this, we have made a rule for ourselves: if a person fulfills all the paper requirements for initiation/elevation and does not receive that degree within two Sabbats' time, the Council of Elders is FORCED to explain why to the petitioner. This seems to curb the temptation to such authoritarian use of power.

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